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Published: March 10, 2010

Updated: 5:11 p.m.

Saddleback issues pink slips to at least 110 teachers

 By ERIKA I. RITCHIE
 THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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ARTICLE

MISSION VIEJO – Saddleback Valley Unified this week will deliver layoff warnings for about 170 jobs, including at least 110 classroom teachers, bringing the district about \$8 million closer to bridging a \$28.6 million budget gap.

Trustees on Tuesday pulled \$4.4 million from an insurance change to ensure funding for elementary music programs, library services and 11 assistant principal posts, but left on the cut list adult school programs, including those for developmentally disabled adults, as well as stipends for work in middle and high school choral music, drama, yearbook and journalism programs.

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million by using a revised plan for a self insurance fund that will provide \$4.4 million.

Staff cuts will require cutting custodial services in half, with service every other day, and increasing class size by five kids to 29 per class in the primary grades.

The pink slips will go out for 110 certificated posts, which include teachers, and about 60 classified jobs, which include custodians, secretaries, carpenters and campus supervisors. Since some jobs are part time, more than 170 people will face job losses if the district confirms the cuts by the state's May 15 deadline.

Still, the district is seeking \$24 million more in employee concessions – furloughs, pay cuts and benefit changes – with the idea that it could reduce layoffs if it achieves all of them or if the governor's revised budget proposals in May present a better funding scenario.

"It's 113 days until June 30," said Stephen McMahon, assistant superintendent for business services. "By that time, we have to have a balanced budget in place. Unless we have that, we will face fiscal takeover."

Community members who packed the trustee meeting chambers applauded when the district decided to keep music, the principals and the limited library hours it provides.

"We'll move forward to move those items back into the budget," said Don Sedgwick, president of the SVUSD board of trustees. "We are revising our list knowing that we will have to make more cuts in May."

The district began the meeting needing to fill a \$33 million deficit gap but reduced it to \$28.6

Story Highlights

Saddleback Valley Unified is hoping to preserve elementary school music, keeping libraries open part-time and keeping assistant principals for school security.

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Because the state adopts its budget after the district must finalize its cuts, Saddleback is planning around a worst-case scenario – notifying more employees of possible job losses than it would like. The state requires layoff notices for certificated teachers to go out by May 15.

"Informing employees and making people aware – doesn't mean everything on the list is a foregone conclusion," said trustee Ginny Fay Aitkens.

Mike Mekata, an elementary instrumental music teacher, rejoiced when the program was retained.

"We were very relieved and quite happy," said Mekata, a 30-year teacher who shuttles among five elementary schools in the district helping to inspire between 2,000 and 3,000 students to pursue music education. "I think it means a lot that they would have thought enough of us to be put back into the ledger."

The program costs the district \$740,000 a year.

Money well spent, said Pat Wayne, a Lake Forest parent, part of Saddleback Alliance for Arts Education.

"I think it's huge," she said. "The arts are a core subject according to 'No Child Left Behind.' This is a core curriculum. The only arts Saddleback has to protect is instrumental music. If they cut that, they will have no arts."

Parents and students who take part of the district's Vocational Visions and the Adult Education Program pleaded with trustees to keep doors open.

"There are 450 men and women who count on these programs," said Ed Kenna, chairman of Vocational Vision.

Behrad Tehranchi, 35, of Lake Forest, said his life would lose much of his social support network and educational opportunities if the adult education programs are cut.

"I've been going there since 2002," he said. "I've taken cooking, boot camp and guys and gals. I'm much more educated now and I have a job. It will hurt me and my friends if they take this program away."

Trustee Suzie Swartz called cutting the adult education program "obscene."

"It speaks poorly of us as a society," she said. "I don't know what we'd trade – they're horrible trades – but our charge is k-12."

She called on district employees and parents to rally, send e-mails and make phone calls to Sacramento.

"They need to find a way to fund us the way our schools should be funded," said Swartz. "There is still a way to make a difference."

Contact the writer: 949-454-7307 or eritchie@ocregister.com

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3/11/2010 10:38 AM PST

[Recommend \(1\)](#)[Report Abuse](#)[Permalink](#)**leenemae** wrote:

My children already have to bring in boxes of Kleenex for their classrooms...is toilet paper next?

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How about some pink slips for the elected officials.

3/10/2010 10:42 PM PST

[Recommend \(4\)](#)[Report Abuse](#)[Permalink](#)**wiseone2980** wrote:

I don't think that by cutting the Elementary Music program the district would really cut \$740k. They aren't laying off the elementary music teachers, like Mr. Mekata, who has 30 years with the district and makes max pay scale rate (and really, do the 7 elementary teachers make \$100K+ each?!?!). The teachers that are going to be pink slipped are the newer music teachers that make half the salary of the elementary teachers because they would just bump them out of their jobs.

I am a product of the SVUSD elementary, jr. high and high school music education program and I wouldn't change my experiences for the world. It is a detriment to the youth of the state to cut music education. I wouldn't be where I am today without my music education and I have a slew of teachers from SVUSD to thank for that. Thank you Cynthia Greer, Dan Robbins, Jennifer McBride, and John Hannan. I am glad that the district managed to save the elementary program from the chopping block for at least one more year.

3/10/2010 9:00 PM PST

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that's a good way to start cutting the budget by cutting education! that means we'll have more brainless leaders in the future running this country to the ground. I need new citizenship and start learning Mandarin just in case the beloved USA is no longer the big brother.

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That's great. More homes will be going to auction soon! Yay!

3/10/2010 4:09 PM PST

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